

September 2011

Mayor Tom Barrett Leads Activities to Commemorate September as Infant Mortality Awareness Month

September is Infant Mortality Awareness Month and this year, Mayor Tom Barrett took advantage of the opportunity to take stock of where we are as a community on this issue, what we've done, and what we need to do. Milwaukee ranks as the 7th worst city for infant mortality among the 53 largest cities in the U.S., according to the 2007 Big Cities Health Inventory. And our infant mortality rates are especially high in minority populations: African American babies die at a rate two to three times higher than white babies. So far this year, at least 60 babies have died in our city before their first birthday.

Perhaps the most high-profile of the events was the continuation of the Strong Baby campaign. The Strong Baby campaign is aimed at improving the health of babies born in Milwaukee and reducing our abysmal infant mortality rate. But more than just being the face on a billboard, or the side of a bus, these babies represent our hope for all babies born in our city: well-cared for, breast-fed, fully-immunized babies with safe sleep environments who were born full-term to mothers who didn't smoke, drink or do drugs during pregnancy. These are the babies who have a strong start and a good chance at a healthy, happy and productive life.



Through a casting call held at the Southside and Northwest Health Centers, five babies were chosen from the hundreds entered by proud parents from all across Milwaukee to be featured next in the campaign. "It was a tough job, choosing just five, but it was a heartwarming experience," said Mayor Barrett.

Once the winners of the Strong Baby casting call were chosen, we began preparing for the next phase of that campaign, which was launched on September 29 with an animated projection of a Strong Baby doing pull ups on the Aurora Sinai building at 12th and Highland, located in one of our three target zip codes. The message promotes proper nutrition in pregnancy with the tagline: "Eat healthier before he's born for a stronger baby after." The campaign is now on bus shelters, billboards and other outdoor venues throughout the city.

As part of Infant Mortality Awareness Month, the Department also staged a safe sleep campaign at Mayfair Mall, putting “pack and play” portable cribs up throughout the mall to raise awareness of the need for babies sleep in a safe environment. Mayor Barrett also launched the “Safe Sleep Sabbath,” with local churches in partnership with Columbia St. Mary’s hospital, to ask pastor to preach a message of safe sleep during Sunday Services. Lastly, we recognized area organizations that have become Safe Sleep Community Partners with a certificate presentation at Southside Health Center.



As we closed out Infant Mortality Awareness Month, our work continued. We are starting to plan next year’s Infant Mortality Summit, which will focus on the “lifecourse perspective.” This perspective, backed by extensive and increasing scientific evidence, emphasizes that healthy (or unhealthy) birth outcomes are the end product of the entire life course of the mother, from the time she was an infant herself. Along these lines, we are supporting the Wisconsin Partnership Program’s Lifecourse Initiative for Healthy Families, an important community-wide initiative which is just finalizing its planning phase and will kick off the implementation phase early next year.



*Commissioner Baker (second from right)
joined by local area pastors*

Many of you in the department work on the front lines every day to promote healthy birth outcomes and reduce the number of babies who don’t live to see their first birthday but we want to send a message that we all have a role to play in this community: women and families, healthcare providers, social service agencies, government, the faith community, and the broader city at large. We have to work together toward our goal of all babies born in our city being Strong Babies, with a good start and a great chance at a healthy and productive life.